

<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/07/10/iran.bahais.jail.trial/>

(CNN) -- Seven Baha'i prisoners face a death-penalty trial Saturday in Iran amid calls for their release from a U.S. panel on religious freedom.

Responding to a letter from Roxana Saberi, the Iranian-American journalist who spent four months in an Iranian jail earlier this year, **the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** demanded the seven prisoners be freed rather than stand trial on charges of espionage and religious violations. If convicted, they could face execution.

"In addition to the hundreds of Iranians who have been detained in the context of Iran's disputed presidential poll, many other 'security detainees' arrested long before the June election remain behind bars," Saberi said in her letter requesting U.S. government intervention in the Baha'i case.

"These Iranians and the authorities who have detained them need to know that the Iranian people's human rights are a matter of international concern," she said.

Saberi, who was tried, convicted and sentenced to eight years in prison on espionage charges, spent time in a cell at Tehran's Evin prison with two of the Baha'i prisoners. Saberi was released in May.

**Leonard Leo, chairman of USCIRF**, said the crackdown on protests after Iran's June 12 presidential elections "have exposed the world to the cold realities about how the Iranian government regularly deals with dissent or views that are a perceived threat to the theocratic regime."